

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 SSO-00 INRE-00 NSCE-00
USIE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07 L-03
NSAE-00 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 DHA-05 /076 W
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FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9348
INFO AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN
AMCONSUL DURBAN
AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG
AMEMBASSY LONDON
USMISSION GENEVA
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L PRETORIA 5748

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PINS, SHUM, SF
SUBJECT: DEATH OF STEVE BIKO: INQUEST: LOOMING DISPUTE OVER
CAUSE OF INJURY

REF: PRETORIA 5666, 5730

1. SUMMARY: ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORT, BIKO INQUEST IS SET
FOR NOV. 14. SAG APPEARS TO BE SETTING STAGE FOR ARGUMENT
BASED ON MEDICAL EVIDENCE THAT BIKO DEATH WAS RESULT OF
ACCIDENTAL FALL OR STRUGGLE WITH POLICE. END SUMMARY.

BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED:

2. OCT. 27 RAND DAILY MAIL REPORTED THAT BIKO FAMILY SOURCES
HAVE INDICATED THAT THERE WILL BE A "BRIEF OPENING TECHNICAL
HEARING" BEFORE A PRETORIA COURT ON OCT. 28 FOLLOWED BY
ADJOURNMENT OF THE BIKO INQUEST UNTIL NOV. 14. REPORT
OF INQUEST DATE COULD NOT BE CONFIRMED BY MINISTER OF
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JUSTICE JIMMY KRUGER OR TRANSVAAL ATTORNEY-GENERAL J.E.
NOTHLING. IN REMAINDER OF LEAD ARTICLE, RAND DAILY
MAIL REVIEWS CRITICISM IT AND OTHER ENGLISH PAPERS RECEIVED
FROM SAG OVER PRIOR REPORTS THAT BIKO DID NOT DIE OF A HUNGER
STRIKE AS SUGGESTED BY MINISTER OF JUSTICE KRUGER.
ARTICLE QUOTES FROM AFRIKAANS NEWSPAPER TO ILLUSTRATE HOW
KRUGER'S HUNGER STRIKE SUGGESTION

WAS ACCEPTED AND REPORTED IN PRO-SAG PRESS.

3. BANNER HEADLINE IN OCT. 27 PRO-SAG CITIZEN WAS "BIKO:
THE TRUE FACTS REVEALED." LEAD STORY, WRITTEN BY AIDA
PARKER, FOLLOWS:

THE CITIZEN CAN TODAY DISCLOSE THE TRUE FACTS ABOUT THE AUTOP-
SY FINDINGS ON MR STEVE BIKO, THE BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS LEADER
WHO DIED WHILE ON POLICE DETENTION ON SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 12.

ACCORDING TO IMPECCABLE MEDICAL SOURCES, THE AUTOPSY REPORT
SHOWS:

THAT THERE WERE NO VISIBLE SIGNS WHATSOEVER OF ANY VIOLENT
BLOW, EITHER TO THE SKULL OR TO ANY OTHER PART OF THE BODY.

THERE WAS BRAIN DAMAGE-BUT THIS RESULTED FROM WHAT IN FORENSIC
TERMS IS KNOWN AS A "CONTRA-COUP". THIS MEANS DAMAGE TO THE BRAIN
ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE CONTACT POINT, SUFFERED AS A RESULT
OF A MOVING HEAD COMING INTO CONTACT WITH A "SOLID, UNYIELDING,
IMMOVABLE" OBJECT, POSSIBLE THE RESULT OF A FALL OR A BUMP.

THERE WERE NO SIGNS OF VIOLENCE EXTERNALLY ON THE HEAD.
THE REPORT SHOWS THAT THE SKULL HAS NO CRACKS IN IT AT ALL--
"NOT EVEN THE FLESH IS CRACKED."

THERE WERE NO BROKEN RIBS

THERE WERE "VERY LIGHT" ABRASIONS ON THE RIB CAGE WITH SLIGHT
BLEEDING FROM TWO SMALL BRUISES, BUT THERE CAN BE--SO I WAS
TOLD--"NO SUGGESTION THAT THESE WERE THE CAUSE OF DEATH".

TESTS TO ESTABLISH WHETHER MR BIKO HAD BEEN SUBJECTED TO ANY
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FORM OF ELECTRICAL SHOCK TREATMENT SHORTLY BEFORE HIS DEATH WERE
NEGATIVE.

THERE WAS GRAVE KIDNEY FAILURE AND UREMIA (UREMIA IS THE CONDITION
OF HAVING TOO MUCH OF THE WASTE PRODUCT UREA IN THE BLOOD).

THE PRIMARY CAUSE OF DEATH, I WAS TOLD, WAS THE BRAIN INJURY,
WITH THE SECONDARY CAUSE RENAL FAILURE.

IT IS EXPECTED THAT THE INQUEST WILL BEGIN WITHIN THE NEXT
DAY OR TWO, AND THAT THERE WILL BE EXTENSIVE MEDICAL DEBATE
ON THE "CONTRACOUP" ASPECT.

AN INDEPENDENT FORENSIC EXPERT EXPLAINED THAT A CONTRA-COUP
BRAIN INJURY IS SUFFERED WHEN A MOVING HEAD IS SUDDENLY STOPPED BY
A HARD, UNYIELDING, IMMOVABLE SURFACE SUCH AS A FLOOR, ROAD
OR WALL, AND IS JERKED TO A HALT.

HE SAID: "THERE ARE THREE DIFFERENT KINDS OF HEAD INJURY.
ONE IS WHERE THE VICTIM IS KNOCKED ON THE HEAD WITH, SAY, A HAMMER,
THUS DAMAGING THE SCALP, THE SKULL AND THE UNDERLYING BRAIN. THIS
IS THE ORDINARY FORM OF BRAIN INJURY.

"NEXT IS THE ROTATIONAL
INJURY; WHERE THE VICTIM GETS HIT AND THE BRAIN STARTS
ROTATING, CREATING SHEARING FORCES AND HAEMORRHAGE.

"THIRD IS A SPECIAL KIND OF INJURY KNOWN AS CONTRA-COUP.

"THIS IS SO-CALLED BECAUSE THE SECTION OF THE MOVING HEAD

THAT MAKES CONTACT WITH THE SOLID, UNYIELDING SURFACE IS THE "COUP" SIDE: THE OPPOSITE SIDE--THE SECTION THAT DOES NOT MAKE CONTACT--IS THE "CONTRA-COUP" SIDE.

"THE INJURY ON THE CONTACT SIDE IS USUALLY SMALLER THAN ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE, WITH THE BRAIN INJURY MORE EXTENSIVE ON THE CONTRA-COUP SIDE.

"THIS SOUNDS PARADOXICAL BUT THAT IS USUALLY WHAT HAPPENS.

"THERE IS STILL A GREAT DEAL OF ARGUMENT ABOUT THIS TYPE OF INJURY BUT THE THEORY IS THAT WHEN THE MOVING HEAD IS SUDDENLY STOPPED BY A FLAT, HARD, UNYIELDING SURFACE, THERE IS AT THE CONTACT POINT A CUSHION OF CEREBRAL FLUID BETWEEN THE BRAIN AND THE BONE INSIDE THE CRANIAL CAVITY THAT PROTECTS THE BRAIN FROM BEING DAMAGED BY THE SLAMMING AGAINST THE BONE.

"IN OTHER WORDS, ON THE COUP OR CONTACT SIDE THE BRAIN IN
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THIS ACTION IS COMPRESSED AGAINST THE SKULL, BUT HAS THIS LAYER OF FLUID TO PROTECT IT. YOU CAN COMPRESS A BRAIN IN THE CUP-SHAPED CAVITY QUITE SHARPLY WITHOUT DAMAGING IT.

"BUT ON THE OTHER SIDE, WHEN THE HEAD STOPS SUDDENLY, THE BRAIN RETRACTS FROM THE BONE AND MOVES IN ALL DIRECTIONS, FLATTENING AND RETRACTING SIDEWAYS.

"IT IS LIKE TAKING A ROUND CLAY BOTTLE AND DROPPING IT ON THE FLOOR. THE CLAY FLATTENS LIKE A PANCAKE.

"THE SURFACE LAYER OF THE BRAIN CONSISTS OF CELLS WHICH WE CALL GREY MATTER, WHICH IS REALLY FIBRE.

"THE TWO ARE OF DIFFERENT COMPOSITION, SO THAT WHEN THE BRAIN RETRACTS SIDEWAYS, THE TWO LAYERS MOVE AT DIFFERENT SPEEDS AWAY FROM THE CENTRAL POLE, GIVING YOU A SHEARING FORCE AS THEY SCRAPE ALONG EACH OTHER.

"IT IS THIS SHEARING FORCE AT THE OPPOSITE POLE WHICH CAUSES ALL THE DAMAGE. IT CAN RUPTURE BLOOD VESSELS AND CAUSE EXTENSIVE BLEEDING OF THE BRAIN TISSUE."

INJURY OF THIS TYPE, I WAS TOLD, UPSETS THE BRAIN FUNCTION. THERE IS THEN A DETERIORATION IN THE VARIOUS FUNCTIONS AS THE BRAIN IS UNABLE TO SEND OUT ITS MESSAGES AND SIGNALS, RESULTING IN ALL SORTS OF DISRUPTIONS--IN THIS CASE, THE KIDNEYS STOPPED FUNCTIONING AND BECAME BLOCKED WITH UREMIA. END TEXT

END UNCLASSIFIED

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4. COMMENT: IT APPEARS THAT ARGUMENT THAT BIKO DIED AS RESULT OF FALL OR BUMP AGAINST WALL WHEN STRUGGLING WITH POLICE OR BY ACCIDENT WHEN HANDCUFFED MAY BE SAG LINE. AS REPORTED IN PRETORIA 5666 REFTEL, STATE PATHOLOGIST LOUBSER ATTEMPTED TO INSERT "MOVABLE HEAD, IMMOVABLE OBJECT" INTO AUTOPSY REPORT AND WITHDREW IT UNDER PROTEST
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FROM OTHER ATTENDING PATHOLOGISTS. HEAVY EMPHASIS ON
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONTRA-COUP INJURY AND
"MOVABLE HEAD", TOGETHER WITH FLOOD OF ACCOMPANYING TECHNICAL
MEDICAL DATA MAY BE ONLY SAG HOPE OF OBFUSCATING
POSSIBILITIES OF POLICE ABUSE IN BIKO CASE.
NELSON

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